

William C. Battle and Barry Battle, Oral History Interview – JFK#4, 8/31/2005
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

William C. Battle was Presidential campaign coordinator for Virginia, North Carolina, and Kentucky for John F. Kennedy (JFK) in 1960 and Ambassador to Australia from 1962-1964. In this interview, Battle and his wife Barry discuss JFK during World War II, the P.T. 109 incident, and their friendship with JFK and Robert F. Kennedy, among other issues.

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William C. and Barry Battle – JFK#4

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Fourth of Four Oral History Interviews

with

William C. and Barry Battle

August 31, 2005

Ivy, Virginia

By Vicki Daitch

For John F. Kennedy Library

DAITCH: I'm just going to set these up, and I'll say that I'm Vicki Daitch, and I'm interviewing Bill and Barry Battle.

BATTLE: Are you traveling by yourself?

DAITCH: I'm visiting my parents, and they're with me right now. But most of the time I just travel by myself. And as you can see, there's nothing fancy about it. It's just these little tape machines. Is it okay if I move this?

BATTLE: Yes. Probably a good idea. We don't want that to get broken.

DAITCH: No. I'll move these over here and make sure they're working okay. Anyway, so what we had hoped to do is clear up a few more questions, but also talk a little bit more about your time in the Navy. And I guess it was my understanding that you met Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] in the Solomons [Solomon Islands].

BATTLE: That's right.

DAITCH: But I know that everybody had to go through training, too. And I thought, well, maybe you had met him in training.

[-1 -]

BATTLE: No. Met him.... He was already at, he'd gone out as a replacement officer. I don't know if he went through training before or after me. But I know he went directly from the training center back out to the Pacific. I went to a squadron. I was in New York for quite a while, fitting, getting the squadron, the boats, fitted out and fixed up, you know, and getting ready to go.

DAITCH: Okay. So you took the same boat from New York all the way to the Pacific.

BATTLE: Right, right.

DAITCH: Whereas he just....

BATTLE: He went out....

DAITCH: He came to replace somebody who was already out there.

BATTLE: Right.

DAITCH: That makes sense. And so you met him when he came out, which was...?

BATTLE: I don't know. I met him in the Solomon Islands at Tulagi, which was our base, our first base in the Solomon Islands. It was right across the strait from Guadalcanal. They were still fighting on Guadalcanal at that time.

DAITCH: Right.

BATTLE: All of their activity.

DAITCH: Nobody talks much about that. That must have been scary. Because people talk about being on the boats and the actions that the boats, you know, were involved in. But it must have been scary just to be on the base and getting bombed.

BATTLE: Well, we didn't have sense enough to be scared. We thought we were big heroes, you know.

BARRY: Well, how soon after the invasion was that?

BATTLE: Oh, a good while.

BARRY: Was that about.... I mean that was three months...

BATTLE: It was more than that, I think.

[-2-]

BARRY: ...of intensive fighting.

BATTLE: It was, yes. It had calmed down considerably by the time I got there. But the air activity hadn't calmed down. There were plenty of planes bombing, strafing, stuff, some dogfights.

DAITCH: Well, and a lot of the other islands were still occupied by the Japanese.

BATTLE: Oh, yes. Sure. This was the first one.

DAITCH: Yes. So you got there in time to sort of....

BATTLE: Went the whole way up the chain of the islands.

DAITCH: So tell me what kinds of things that you would have been doing at Tulagi around the time Kennedy came on board.

BATTLE: Playing cards mainly.

DAITCH: Yes?

BATTLE: Yes. That was the only pastime we had really. There wasn't when.... We did patrols. But they were very low key. [Telephone interruption] Really, there wasn't any activity.

DAITCH: Oh, there wasn't at that time?

BATTLE: Hmm?

DAITCH: There was not much activity at that time?

BATTLE: Not on the patrols, no.

DAITCH: Oh, really! So that was later, though? Because there were....

BATTLE: Oh, yes.

DAITCH: So what changed?

BATTLE: Well, we moved our base. We moved up to Rendova, which is right across from Munda, New Georgia, which was one of the big Jap airbases. And that was very active. That's where we were operating from when the boat, *109*, was wrecked. That was Rendova.

DAITCH: Now by that time you knew Kennedy pretty well?

[-3-]

BATTLE: Yes, yes. Well, we were.... Yes. Mmmm hmmm.

DAITCH: You know it's interesting. I don't think that.... I've talked to some other people who were PT boat captains or execs or whatnot, and they've been very nice and honest. They haven't made any claims that they had any special relationship with him. They just kind of knew him, he was just one of the guys.

BATTLE: No, we were just two guys in the boats, like any other two guys.

DAITCH: Yes. But I wondered whether, because obviously your friendship lasted and became a lot closer over the years. I wondered whether you just kind of hit it off especially then?

BATTLE: No, I don't think so. I think that, in retrospect, I never realized this at the time, but I think that.... [Interruption]

DAITCH: Why don't we just bring that picture of the *109* guys and see if there was anybody in particular that you remembered.

BATTLE: No. No, I didn't know his crew.

DAITCH: Did you know Lenny Thom [Leonard J. Thom], the exec?

BATTLE: Oh, very well. Knew him very well.

DAITCH: Kennedy liked him a lot.

BATTLE: I knew Lenny better than I knew Jack at that time.

DAITCH: Oh, really!

BATTLE: Mmmm hmmm. Because we shared a tent.

DAITCH: Oh, you did!

BATTLE: Mmmm hmmm.

DAITCH: No kidding! What was he like?

BATTLE: Oh, he was a wonderful guy. Big, gentle giant. Very good sense of humor, very responsible.

DAITCH: I talked to his wife [Kate Thom Kelley], and she was just lovely.

[-4-]

BATTLE: Yes. When did you talk to her?

DAITCH: Less than a year ago. She's doing well. She's still beautiful. I saw a picture of her. She must have been just gorgeous.

BATTLE: Yes, she was pretty good.

DAITCH: She was really beautiful.

BATTLE: She was a very stout Catholic, I think. Lenny, he wasn't much for, he wasn't too religious.

DAITCH: Is that right? But she loved him. I mean she....

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: You know all these years later. I'm sure the loss was devastating to her. But she said, she told me something that was interesting, that Kennedy was the first person to call and say, you know, "I'll be there" after he was killed.

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: And this was one of their PT boat colleagues. He was Kennedy's executive officer. And he was killed just a couple of years after he returned to the States.

BARRY: Is this the one who...?

BATTLE: Lenny, Lenny Thom.

BARRY: During the inauguration parade the replica of the *Pt-109* went by, Jack called Lenny Thom's son down, didn't he? Oh, no, I guess the son was on the boat.

BATTLE: Yes.

BARRY: As it went by.

DAITCH: Yes. Yes, it was really.... I had talked to Kate, his widow. And, of course, she had long since remarried and had a long marriage and so forth. But she told me that Kennedy was one of the first people to call her when Lenny was killed, and that he came right away to the funeral and so forth. And was very, very supportive. And, you know, always friendly to her afterwards. And knew her new husband was....

BATTLE: I didn't know she'd remarried.

[-5-]

DAITCH: She remarried after a few years, and her husband was the son of a congressman, and his name escapes me right now, whose office was across the hall from Kennedy's.

BATTLE: Oh, really!

DAITCH: Yes. He didn't actually introduce them. But there was all that connection.

BARRY: Didn't Lenny Thom's son, come with you...?

DAITCH: I saw him in Alaska, when [Inaudible] and I were up in Alaska.

BARRY: Oh, I thought you wrote him and told him about his dad.

BATTLE: I wrote.... This guy got in touch with me who knew Kate, asked me to.... And their daughter was terminally ill and wanted something about Lenny, and I wrote them several times.

DAITCH: Oh. They were very nice people, nice family.

BATTLE: Wonderful, wonderful.

DAITCH: I really, really enjoyed talking to her. And she, you know, knew a little bit about their PT boat experiences. But more than that, she was telling

me about how wonderful Kennedy was with her, and he kept up a friendship with her over the years, too.

BATTLE: Yes, he would.

DAITCH: I guess the reason that I brought that up is to sort of find out, you know, your experience with Kennedy in terms of the developing friendship.

BATTLE: Yes. Well, I was going to say I think in hindsight, what people have told me and so forth, it's just happenstance, I'd had a couple of really tough patrols, one of them when Lieutenant [Inaudible] was killed and one other officer. A bad night. And Jack always respected that, in looking back on it. And I think it's one of his characteristics. He tried to, oh, he did conduct himself that way.

DAITCH: Can you explain a little bit more about what you meant by he respected that?

BATTLE: Well, he had respect for people who had gone through stuff like that and come out okay.

BARRY: Did he downplay his own part in action?

[-6-]

BATTLE: I don't think he ever particularly down....

BARRY: I said downplay his own part.

BATTLE: No, no.

BARRY: I was trying to get the modesty routine going.

DAITCH: I heard that. I was waiting for....

BATTLE: I don't think he was a real modest guy. He wasn't cocky, but he was full of life and a big bounce.

DAITCH: Was he?

BATTLE: Oh, yes.

DAITCH: Because I had always thought he was kind of a skinny little....

BATTLE: Oh, he was skinny all right.

DAITCH: I guess everybody was at that time.

BATTLE: I was skinny, too. Is this thing on?

DAITCH: It is, yes.

BATTLE: Yes, I weighed about 150.

DAITCH: Yes, everybody. I understand that the food wasn't so hot.

BATTLE: You didn't get fed out there, no. I don't know how to explain what I'm trying to say. But....

BARRY: You always told me about it as that he sort of had a very self-deprecating kind of humor and that he did not....

BATTLE: Well, he could....

BARRY: That he did not take himself seriously.

BATTLE: Well, that's right. He could throw a joke on himself, no doubt about that.

BARRY: Probably he wasn't full of himself.

[-7-]

BATTLE: He wasn't a braggart by any means. And he could poke fun at himself as you saw throughout his time as president. Those press conferences were such tremendous productions.

DAITCH: Oh, I love those.

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: They're so much fun to watch.

BARRY: The other thing you told me, Bill, was that after you all picked him up, Bill was on the ship that conned the other PT boat in because their ship only had radar on it....

DAITCH: Oh, good, okay.

BARRY: And so after you conned the other boat in to pick up Jack and the crew,

then you went back on patrol.

BATTLE: That's right.

BARRY: When you go back into base that night, the first thing Jack said to you, "Boy, you all have gone through hell, had a helluva time, haven't you?" Because he'd been observing all the firepower that they were....
But, you know, that was the start of the whole thing.

BATTLE: Yes, that's right. Yes, that's what he said. That was the next morning. We came back in off patrol the next morning. When we got there, he met me at the dock. He said, "You sure have had a tough time of it, haven't you?"

DAITCH: Wow!

BATTLE: I said, "You've been on a picnic yourself, haven't you?"

DAITCH: Right.

BARRY: [Inaudible].

DAITCH: Right. Yes.

BARRY: I thought that was very indicative of the man's character.

DAITCH: Absolutely. Yes, and the other fellows....

BATTLE: That's what I'm trying to say, that he focused on that sort of thing.

[-8-]

DAITCH: Yes, yes. I mean he could've said, Where were you? Why weren't you out looking for me? And instead....

BATTLE: He could very easily have. He couldn't have said that to me because I wasn't in his outfit. But in his section, I never will know why the squadron command and the people in his division that night ran off. I never will understand that.

DAITCH: I think it's a difficult thing. In the middle of a battle, you don't know. But I talked to a guy who was an exec on one of the boats that was with him that night.

BARRY: What did he say?

DAITCH: He said they just genuinely.... These guys were right, you know, they were running in echelon. And he said that Kennedy's boat was right here and got sliced, and his boat was right here, and the *Amagiri* came right by it.

BATTLE: Was that Phil Potter's [Philip Potter] boat?

DAITCH: No, I think it was Lowrey's [John R. Lowery] boat.

BATTLE: Lowrey. Mmmm hmmm.

DAITCH: And....

BARRY: And what did he say?

DAITCH: He said that the fireball was so huge, and the PT boat was obviously crushed, that they just didn't think that there was any chance at all of finding any survivors.

BARRY: But that's a terrible....

BATTLE: That is terrible.

DAITCH: Well, and they were running from the, I mean they were being fired on, too, by the ship, he said. And that they were getting away from the ship.

BATTLE: But still, there's no excuse for leaving the.... What was I going to tell you? When the accident happened, I must have been ten or twelve miles away. It just lit up the horizon. Unbelievable. I wanted to go out and look for them the next day. But we did not have air superiority at that time, and the squadron commander would not permit it. And he closed off the fuel dock so nobody could go. Quite a few of us wanted to go.

[-9-]

DAITCH: Really!

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: I had not heard that.

BATTLE: Yes, yes. And he gave orders that the fuel dock be closed.

DAITCH: Wow! That was Commander Kelly [Robert B. Kelly]?

BATTLE: No, that was Warfield [Thomas G. Warfield].

DAITCH: Oh, Warfield, right. Okay.

BATTLE: And we looked.... You know we went to the same area at night on patrol, but we never saw anything, and they never saw us.

BARRY: I thought you changed your, I thought orders changed and you'd gone down another slot.

BATTLE: Huh?

BARRY: Were going down another slot?

BATTLE: We did both. We did go in the same way several times at night. I don't remember saying.... Anyhow....

DAITCH: But nobody.... He did tell me, the guy that was on the *162*, I think it was *162*, Lowrey's boat anyway, he did tell me that they radioed, and they wanted to get an airplane to go over and see if they could see anything.

BATTLE: Well, they did the next morning.

DAITCH: Oh, okay.

BATTLE: They had air survey. They didn't see a thing. I don't see how the planes, they couldn't have gotten in the right place. Because here this big hulk of the boat was still floating, the crew was still on it.

DAITCH: Right.

BATTLE: In broad daylight, how they could miss seeing them out in the gulf there is beyond me.

[-10-]

DAITCH: Right. Depending on what time they went, they should've seen them.

BATTLE: Well, daylight.

DAITCH: Yes, at first light.

BATTLE: But I never will know why those guys didn't go back and look for them.

DAITCH: Yes. It is an odd thing. And you do wonder about, in the middle of war, it's hard to....

BATTLE: Yes. What sort of decision would you make? you know.

DAITCH: Yes. And, you know, they're being fired upon and so on. But he told me, I thought it was just, it sounded so scary to be in a little PT boat compared to the *Amagiri*. And he said he could literally look up and see the Japanese crew running around to get into their positions and getting ready to fire on them.

BATTLE: Right.

DAITCH: They were that close.

BATTLE: Was he aware of the ship bearing down on him?

DAITCH: He said it was so fast that there was literally nothing he could do. And they didn't see it coming any faster than Kennedy did.

BATTLE: That hasn't been publicized at all.

DAITCH: No. Although there are people who, I mean obviously there are people who.... One of the reasons we've been focusing on this there's this argument that, oh, Kennedy should have done something different. And he never even fired and so on. And there are plenty.... I mean everybody who was there knows that it was.... And this is what they've been telling me; you can tell me if it's any different, but it was very, very dark.

BATTLE: Yes, terrible. Yes.

DAITCH: And there was no light whatsoever. And you ran without lights.

BATTLE: That's right.

DAITCH: And there is a little bit of conflict about he was running on one engine, and there are three engines. And you can't maneuver with just one engine. But someone else had told me, I've gotten different stories, another fellow told me

that they did that purposefully because it was easy to see the phosphorous of wake on three engines.

BATTLE: That's exactly right.

DAITCH: Okay. So that was a normal procedure.

BATTLE: That's right.

DAITCH: Okay.

BATTLE: The one engine.... The thing that you have to understand is that in a PT boat, the engines, the gears, are engaged by the engineer in the engine room with his feet on the handles. And if you're running on one engine ahead, in order to engage the other two before you can accelerate, you have to get them in gear. And you do that by a signal from the bridge which is a throttle that you push, and it flashes down in the engine room where the engineer's sitting there. And he has to sit. So it takes time.

DAITCH: Right.

BATTLE: And the phosphorous was so bad out there that a plane could see you from miles away if you were running with three engines ahead. It was just like having a torch on your stern.

DAITCH: Right.

BARRY: Well, then, how come there wasn't phosphorous coming out of the Japanese ship?

BATTLE: Well, I'm sure it was. But you don't see it from in the front. You see it from the wake.

DAITCH: And the sound. I worried about, well, why didn't they hear it if this big huge...?

BATTLE: Yes, that didn't matter.

DAITCH: A couple of people have told me that, which seems odd.

BATTLE: I'm sure it made some noise, but you wouldn't hear it coming on.

DAITCH: Right. And I guess the PT boat engine....

BATTLE: But I never heard that Lowrey was riding next to him. I didn't know

that.

[-12-]

DAITCH: I'm pretty sure it was Lowrey's boat.

BATTLE: That's very interesting.

DAITCH: And they didn't fire. I mean the one thing that the exec from his boat had told me was that it wasn't just Kennedy that didn't fire. They didn't fire either.

BATTLE: Oh, no.

DAITCH: Because they were too close.

BATTLE: That's right.

DAITCH: Their torpedoes wouldn't have done anything.

BATTLE: That's right, that's right. Because of their position.

BARRY: They didn't follow the code of the Seals and Marines that you do not leave anyone behind.

BATTLE: What?

BARRY: You know the Marines and the Seals have this code that you don't leave anyone behind.

BATTLE: Well, you don't leave it, no. You ought not to. Of course you shouldn't.

BARRY: I didn't know if that was looked into during World War II, if that was part of the code or not.

BATTLE: Well, I'm sure it was an unwritten code. I certainly felt that way. I wouldn't want anybody to leave me behind.

DAITCH: No, that's right. I'm sure there were people who disagreed, on the boats that night, too. But whatever the officers, you know, decided....

BATTLE: Well, it was very normal procedure. What he was doing was sort of patrolling back and forth waiting for these people to come out from where they'd been into.

DAITCH: Right.

BATTLE: When they came, they came so fast....

[-13-]

DAITCH: Well, and I guess it was a very confusing night, because I've read the accounts of it.

BATTLE: Yes, it was not a well-coordinated maneuver.

DAITCH: Yes. I mean different ships from, different PT boats that were supposed to be in one group ended up with another group.

BATTLE: Yes, yes. Right. We made the first contact, my section, and nobody heard our radio transmission. The boats that were with me didn't. We made the attack, and the boats with me didn't go in. They thought that the firing coming at us from the ships was coming from the shore batteries. They were right in against the beach. And so it was, we made.... One boat instead of the whole division of four boats made the attack, and I don't think we hit anything.

DAITCH: Yes, yes.

BATTLE: Because the boats, one of our tubes flashed, which means that oil in the tube caught on fire when they fired the torpedo. And that showed us up to where we were. And the lead destroyer immediately turned and chased us. So any line we'd have had on the firing, he would have turned away from it. And he closed to.... I think we were under the depression of his big guns at one time.

DAITCH: Really!

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: That must have been scary.

BATTLE: Then we laid down a smokescreen and ducked behind it.

DAITCH: Yes. Wow! So I guess this is where the maneuverability and speed of a PT boat comes in handy, to get away from that.

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: Because I would think that a destroyer could in a straight line move faster probably.

BATTLE: Yes, probably in the ocean. But we got behind it. And then he was a pretty smart guy, that skipper of that ship. He turned back and went on back into where he was supposed to be going. And how the hell he got through those reefs and in between the two islands where he was going into Munda at a high speed, I don't know. We couldn't see a thing.

[-14-]

DAITCH: Wow!

BATTLE: I don't know how he did it.

DAITCH: Yes. So how would you spot a ship in conditions like that, when it's completely dark and...?

BATTLE: You wouldn't.

DAITCH: You just don't see it unless it's silhouetted against something.

BATTLE: Yes, yes.

BARRY: No moonlight that night?

BATTLE: Oh, no. It was black night, black.

DAITCH: A couple of people have talked about seeing that big flash, though. Apparently it was....

BATTLE: It was a big flash. I mean we had been ordered to go back to the base, which was a mistake. That was one of the mistakes that was made.

DAITCH: Why is that? Why were you ordered back, and why was it a mistake?

BATTLE: Well, we had fired our torpedoes.

DAITCH: All of them?

BATTLE: Yes, all four. And the, whoever was in charge of the operation. I think it was Brantingham [Henry J. Brantingham]. The senior officer gave the order that the boats that had fired to return to base. Maybe to get out of the way or whatever. I don't know. But if we'd thought about it, we had radar. My boat was one of the few that had radar. Jack didn't have radar. If he'd left us out there and used us as a picket boat, we would've been able to detect those guys coming out, and we

would've been able to report them to the other boats. And we might have got them. I don't know. But certainly Jack and Lowrey would've known they were coming.

DAITCH: Now there's this big.... I heard that it was really important to maintain radio silence.

BATTLE: Yes. I don't know why.

DAITCH: Really?

[-15-]

BATTLE: Looking back on it, it seems to me that always seemed to me to be a dramatic order, radio silence. But we broke radio silence when we detected them first on the radar. And it was amazing because they were within ten minutes of where the coast watcher said they would be in the same place, right in a line coming right down by Kolombangara, right down The Slot.

DAITCH: Yes.

BATTLE: But we messed it up.

DAITCH: The radio silence thing.... Actually, again, I've read some of these reports which as sort of a non-military person some of it is not real clear to me. But in one of the reports, this sort of report of the analysis of what happened with *109*, some of the lessons learned from it were to use the radio.

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: You know to make sure that all the boats know what....

BATTLE: What's going on.

DAITCH: Yes. If you make contact....

BATTLE: That's right.

DAITCH: You should tell the other boats.

BATTLE: Well, we did, we did. But nobody got the word. I don't know whether there was a dead spot in there or not. They understood.... They heard it back at base. But they didn't hear it on the other boats right there.

DAITCH: Yes.

BATTLE: I don't understand that.

DAITCH: Yes. I'm sure those things were not all, and I know that, for example, radar was brand new at the time.

BATTLE: Right, right.

DAITCH: And I'm sure that some of your other equipment was....

BATTLE: Why I don't think but two of us, three of us had radar. And any boat with radar should have been out there. We shouldn't have gone back to base. Hindsight, let's face it.

[-16-]

DAITCH: Right. I guess it's easier to see these things in hindsight. So anyway, what happened? You sort of guided the boat in to pick up Jack. And then when you got back to the base after your patrol that night, he made this comment about you guys having a hard week.

BATTLE: Yes. "I hear you've had a pretty tough time of it this week."

DAITCH: So what happened after that? I guess he and the crew needed maybe some medical treatment, or did they stay there?

BATTLE: Yes, he had hurt his back. You know he had been beat up. On several of the nights when he swam out trying to hail us down as we came on patrol, he passed out a couple of times coming back in and was beat up on the coral. And I think that was the first time he did his back in. I think.

DAITCH: Well, I think he'd already had some back problems.

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: But that would've made it a lot worse.

BATTLE: It didn't help him. And he had a little time off, and I guess his crew needed a little rest. They got him another boat, and he stayed out there for a while. I don't remember what happened to him. I don't know what his trail was from there back home. I know he came back to the hospital.

DAITCH: Yes, he did. I wondered whether you had been in the same actions with him after that. Because he got another boat. He got the 59, I think.

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: And I don't know if it was the same crew. Some of his crew probably.

BATTLE: It was an old 77-footer, I think.

DAITCH: It was an old boat.

BARRY: Well, the first boat he got, according to the book I read, got beat up and he spent a lot of time trying to get in shape to take out for the first time.

BATTLE: Yes, the *109* was. But that was an 80-foot boat. His last boat, I think, was the 77-footer, which was one of the first ones out there.

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DAITCH: Did you have much contact with him after that, or were you sort of stationed separately?

BATTLE: Yes, well, sure.

BARRY: How many people were on the base?

BATTLE: Huh?

BARRY: How big was the base? How many people were on it?

BATTLE: Oh, I don't know Barry. You had 12 or 14 people on each boat, and you had a base force of machine shop mechanics and all of that. I guess a couple of hundred. I don't know. It'd be a guess, a wild guess.

DAITCH: Do you remember about how many boats were at Rendova?

BATTLE: Probably 12, 13, 14.

DAITCH: So it wasn't a huge number.

BATTLE: No.

DAITCH: Pretty small.

BATTLE: No. And there were several different squadrons, five, nine, and ten. Five, nine, and ten, and then nine went over to another base. But at this point they were there.

DAITCH: I get the feeling that nine was sort of the main squadron, and some of the other ones were remnants of squadrons.

BATTLE: Ten was the main squadron.

DAITCH: Oh, ten was the main squadron.

BATTLE: So was nine. Nine moved over to another base on the other side of New Georgia.

BARRY: Which one was Kerese [Richard Kerese] in?

BATTLE: He was five.

DAITCH: Kennedy was....

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BATTLE: Two or three or something like that.

DAITCH: Yes, two or something like that.

BATTLE: Just the remnants of some old squadrons that went out there first.

DAITCH: Yes. So I take it, though, that the fact that Kennedy came down and met you at the dock, by that time you guys were reasonable friends?

BATTLE: Well, that or.... I'm trying to.... I guess that is part of why I say what I do about his feeling of respect for people who'd been through tough times. It indicates that he had a high interest in what had gone on and happened, and felt respect for what we had been through. Of the three officers, I was the only one alive when we got back to base that night.

DAITCH: Really!

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: Wow!

BATTLE: And my boat was shot to hell.

DAITCH: That was the night that they picked up Kennedy? Or the night before?

BATTLE: Oh, no. It was probably two or three nights before.

DAITCH: Okay. That was a bad week.

BATTLE: Yes, it was.

DAITCH: I wonder if that was one of the reasons why they didn't send anybody out, back out, to the *109*?

BATTLE: No.

DAITCH: You don't think so?

BATTLE: Mmmm mmmm. The reason they didn't send anybody out was they didn't think anybody'd be alive, number one, which was not a good reason. But the other was a lack of air superiority. The Japanese still had plenty.

BARRY: I'm having a hard time visualizing what you all did on base because I assume that there would be different groups, you know, those that maintained and those that were officers on the boat.

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BATTLE: No, boats with their—men and officers all melded together.

BARRY: Well, I mean was there...?

BATTLE: You'd have things you had to do. You'd come in, you might have to get water, fill up your tank. You might have to do this. You always had to refuel. That would take a while. You'd have to strain all your gas through a sheering and a funnel.

DAITCH: Really! You had to strain the gas?

BATTLE: Yes, get the water out.

DAITCH: Oh, my gosh! We're talking thousands of gallons of gas.

BATTLE: That's right.

DAITCH: How much did they hold? Something like 2,000 gallons or 3,000 gallons?

BATTLE: Three thousand.

DAITCH: That's an incredible amount of gas.

BARRY: Well there was no, where you could watch M-A-S-H, or a bar you could all go to?

BATTLE: We had an officers' club. But we wouldn't start that 'til late in the afternoon.

BARRY: I was just wondering, did you run into Jack there?

BATTLE: What?

BARRY: Did you run into Jack there?

BATTLE: Oh, sure. Everybody, you weren't running into anybody. You were all together. It wasn't a big group of officers.

BARRY: Well, I think that's what Vicki's trying to get to, what was it like on the...? Did you have alcohol that you had to make yourself? Did he drink?

BATTLE: He never did drink much, but he did take a drink. And I told a story up there in Boston about the Catholic priest, Father West, who was a marvelous man, big, husky Princeton football player. Great guy. Catholic priest. He was our squadron chaplain, our base chaplain. And I used to see all the Catholic boys, they were

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Keresey and Kennedy and Fay [Paul B. Fay, Jr.], Reed, you know, all the Catholics, would go to Father West's tent every afternoon. I thought, you know....

BARRY: They were going up there for confession.

BATTLE: Those guys are really into this religion stuff. And one day I had to go over there to get somebody out, to take a message either to Fay or to I've forgotten who it was for. And here they were all sitting around having a drink of his private stock. I extracted quite a bit for my silence.

DAITCH: Good for you. That's cute. I guess the thing that's interesting to me, too, is in this sort of, obviously it's not a social setting, but it is because everything is, you know....

BATTLE: Oh, yes. Sure.

DAITCH: But Kennedy's sort of.... There are certain people that he became good

friends with and carried on the friendships such as you and Fay. And obviously, I think, probably would have been Lenny Thom if he'd lived.

BATTLE: Oh, yes.

DAITCH: But, you know, what developed in those friendships, I was just wondering if there was anything at that time that you could have picked out.

BATTLE: Not at that time. Like when after he was elected president, a group of us just happened to get together in Washington, Al Webb, Lenny, Carleton Byrd, about five or six of us. And as I knew would happen after a couple of drinks, everybody'd want to call him. And so Al went and called him, and they chatted. And he said, "Who's there?" And he told him. He said, "Well, look, come on over for a movie after dinner. I'll be free at say seven o'clock. You all come on over here, and we'll have a movie. You have my address."

DAITCH: Is that what you did then?

BATTLE: Yes.

BARRY: When was the first contact you had after the war was over?

BATTLE: I don't know. He was in Congress. I reckon the first time I saw him that he was in Congress, and I was in Washington. In those days I was in Washington a lot. And I went by to just visit with him. I remember him sitting there with a hole in his sock.

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DAITCH: In his congressional office?

BATTLE: Yes. Big hole and his toe was sticking through it.

BARRY: Bill was invited to the wedding. And not only didn't respond but didn't go. Can you imagine?

DAITCH: No. *The* wedding.

BARRY: He needed me at that time. Because if I had known.... At least you have to respond. What manners!

BATTLE: They knew I was a no-account bachelor and didn't know any better.

DAITCH: So how come you didn't go?

BATTLE: I guess maybe one of the reasons I get along so well with the Kennedys is that I never did make them, you know, royalty.

DAITCH: I think the thing that is important to get at with some of these interviews.... One of the things that somebody told me who was a good friend of his, and I tend to believe this, of course never having met Kennedy, but it doesn't seem as if any of the biographies have somehow ever really captured him, the person, as an individual.

BATTLE: I think that's right.

DAITCH: And this is one of the things that I'd like to try to do with the interviews, even though it's not objective and it's not, you know, dry archival papers. But it's insights of people who knew him well and what was that made him.... There's no doubt that he was an extraordinary person.

BATTLE: Yes, that's right.

BARRY: Well, I tell you, when you were around him. It was just to me, I can't even put it in words, the effect that he had. I mean I was very young. I must have been in my mid-twenties when I met him the first time, and it was just like going in his presence of....

BATTLE: We, one time.... I don't know what I had. I had had the job of trying to get him to come to speak to a big political meeting in Virginia down at Old Point Comfort League of Virginia Municipalities, all of the constitutional officers. It was big and important, and he was in Congress. And so Fay and I picked him up at the airport and took him to the meeting and took him back to the airport. And during that trip, of

[-22-]

course, he and I were, being big heroes rehashing the Pacific, and in his.... He never was humble, you know. But he was un-humble in a very attractive way. We were bragging along. And he looked at Barry, and Barry's sitting between us in the front seat of the car, he said, "Barry, what were you doing when we were doing all these great things?" She said, "I was in the third grade." And that was the end of that conversation. That must have clammed up Mr. Jack Kennedy pretty good.

DAITCH: That's cute. Tell me, do you have any other examples? I like this. You know because you hear so much about he was so modest and self-

deprecating and so forth. And you can see that he has this charming sense of humor, as you said, in the press interviews and so forth. But also he knew he was Jack Kennedy.

BATTLE: Oh, yes.

DAITCH: And I don't know if maybe you can expand on that a little bit or just other examples of that?

BATTLE: I don't know if I can.

BARRY: What about the...?

BATTLE: Oh, that one.

BARRY: He said, "Oh, God! I love this song." He came into the Paul Young Restaurant the night before the inauguration, and they played "Hail to the Chief," but he was sitting at the table with us. He said, "Oh, I love this song."

DAITCH: Cute.

BATTLE: Yes. We should get that on there. Can you speak up?

DAITCH: Yes, I hope this is.... Actually, if you don't mind, this is a little rude, and I don't usually do this. But I want to.... [Interruption]

BARRY: I don't know if you want to hear all that stuff anyway.

DAITCH: Well, we will because I think it's important. I mean again, that's just something that's important. Let me go back to sort of where we were, I think, for a minute, and that is we were talking about how he just had this self-deprecating sense of humor and so forth. And we were talking about when you first met him, Barry, that you were really young and so impressed with him. But at this time, I mean it's easy to be impressed with the president. But at this time he was a congressman still or was maybe a senator?

BATTLE: He was a congressman.

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DAITCH: Okay. That's impressive, but it's not.... Probably you'd met other congress-people. So it wasn't just the position.

BARRY: I think the first time I met him was when that picture over here was

taken, and he came to Charlottesville to speak to the law school.

DAITCH: Oh, really!

BARRY: And Bill's dad [John Stewart Battle] introduced him because Bill's father was.... And Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] came and Bob [Robert F. Kennedy]. And Ted [Edward Moore Kennedy] was already here. Ted was here at the law school. So I saw Ted every night, in my kitchen, practically.

DAITCH: Really!

BATTLE: He and Varick Tunney [John V. Tunney] rented a house right next door to them.

DAITCH: Oh, who was the person he rented a house with?

BARRY: John Tunney.

BATTLE: Varick Tunney.

BARRY: Oh, it was Varick in those days. They were in law school.

DAITCH: Oh, okay.

BATTLE: Ted and Varick were roommates.

DAITCH: Oh, okay. And they lived next door.

BARRY: Yes. And Bill got Jack to agree to come and address the law school. And so they all came down. It snowed that night, so they ended up staying over. That was the first time I met him. And then Jackie came. We had a big party. And I remember sitting in the living room, and Jack was talking to Bill and a man about, you know, "I think if I'm going to do it, if I'm going to run, I've got to run now because I don't want those things to come back to haunt me." And I was just fascinated by this. And Jackie was sitting over here, and she had a daughter [Caroline Bouvier Kennedy], her daughter and my daughter [Jane Battle] were both born at the same time. And she thought we were talking about the children....

[END SIDE 1, TAPE 1; BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

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BARRY: Getting involved in the national scene or whatever. So I felt like we were sitting in the middle of a very historic conversation that night.

And I didn't know we were talking about my children.

DAITCH: Right.

BARRY: But I think that was the first time I met him.

BATTLE: I remember a similar occasion. We were.... Sarge Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.] called me. This was July before the convention. They were going to have a get-away the fourth weekend in Hyannis. No politics and all that. You and Barry come on up and stay with us. We were the only ones there not Kennedys.

DAITCH: Really!

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: That's nice, nice invitation.

BATTLE: And during the weekend, Truman [Harry S. Truman] comes up with a powerful speech for Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson]. And his closing remarks: "Are you ready, Jack?" And they've determined that they've got to answer that. So Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] comes up, and he and Jack closet themselves, and they put together a beautiful speech.

BARRY: I can see them sitting on that porch....

BATTLE: And then that night before dinner we'd go over to Jack's house, and he gets everybody together, and.... No, Kennedy didn't drink much. You know he'd have maybe one drink. We're sitting around, and he read the speech to everybody. He'd call around to all of his political honchos to get their reaction during the afternoon. And he goes around the room, and of course everybody's got something to put in, me and everybody else. So he got around to Barry, and Barry said, "Truthfully, I think it's great. I wouldn't change a thing." And he shut it up like that's it. "That's good enough for me." If it suits Jake Garvey and Barry Battle, it's good enough for me. You know who Jake Garvey was?

DAITCH: No.

BATTLE: He was the old political boss of Chicago.

BARRY: I stayed up all night trying.... I was the only one....

BATTLE: You got the original rooms.

DAITCH: You're right. We're going to try to get that for the Library archives.

BARRY: [Inaudible].

DAITCH: Wow!

BARRY: But that [Inaudible]. I know his hand is [Inaudible].

BATTLE: That was a quote from Lincoln [Abraham Lincoln].

BARRY: I said it was.

BATTLE: I didn't.... You're talking so I can't hear you.

BARRY: Well, that was.... All the time that I spent around him was just so charged with excitement. I mean you know the time in the country, I'm sorry you didn't live in those days because there was this sense of hope, a sense that great things could be done with this man as president. And that there was nothing this country couldn't achieve under his guidance. But I wish I could [Inaudible].

DAITCH: It seemed possible then.

BATTLE: Two other times that you could look into his personality: That night at the Paul Young Restaurant, he went directly there rather than go to the gala because we couldn't get to the gala because of the snowstorm.

DAITCH: Was that the pre-inauguration?

BATTLE: The night before. And they sat us at a table for two on the side, when we came in.

BARRY: They thought Bill was Stan Musial, the baseball player. We found out about that after we'd gotten in.

BATTLE: That's right. And then as things went on after the gala was over and all that, whatever they did, Jack came in and went around the room speaking to everybody. He came over to our table and said, "Do you mind if I sit and have breakfast with you?" I said, "Maybe we can put up with it." You know. And, you know, that whole room changed, to me at least. Everybody focused right in on that table. And this gal comes by and gives Jack a big hug, a big kiss, and moves on off. And Barry says, "Jack, who in the world was that?" "Hey, you dummy, don't you know anything? That's Kim Novak." You know Kim Novak? She was an actress.

DAITCH: Oh, okay.

BATTLE: [REDACTED]

BARRY: [REDACTED]

DAITCH: [REDACTED]

BATTLE: [REDACTED]

BARRY: [REDACTED]

DAITCH: Wow!

BATTLE: I don't know if you want to put all this stuff on tape or not.

BARRY: No, don't put that on it. And I wouldn't want to put anything on there that would reinforce those stories about Jack and all the women.

DAITCH: Yes. Well, I mean the story that you just told, he got up, he jumped up, and he went after her. Was he seriously going after her? Or was he...?

BARRY: Well, he came back. He came back.

DAITCH: Well, let's talk about that now as long as it's in the air, about the... I think probably it's fair to say that certainly there was some womanizing, but not at the level that.... I mean because there is, you know, that's documented, such and such documents.

BATTLE: Yes. Many of them claim to have been there that weren't.

DAITCH: Yes. So we can assume there's a fair amount of....

BATTLE: I think there probably was.

DAITCH: But as much as you were with him and spent time with him....

BATTLE: I never saw any.

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DAITCH: You didn't particularly. What about his relationship with Jackie? I mean just.... I wondered from what you were saying that she's all interested in the children, he's worried about politics. But she was a bright woman and beautiful.

BATTLE: She was smart as hell.

BARRY: I used to write a lot [Inaudible] reports. After these things had happened to me, I was writing back to my parents and Bill's parents telling them what it was like. And I remember describing at the age of 25 or something like that, describing a really cute couple.

DAITCH: Well, they were.

BARRY: They were. Well, one time at Hyannis Port Ted was teaching me to water ski. And Bill and Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] were on the boat, and the boat stopped running, and they started drifting off, of course no life jackets. And we were probably about a mile or so, two miles from shore. And Ted was, he was white. I mean he just said, "Well, I hope you can swim because I ain't gonna tow you in. I said, "Well, I can swim." So we started swimming. But Ted was wonderful. That's why I never believed the Chappaquiddick story. Because he did everything he could to make me feel, you know, this isn't a problem. [Inaudible] story. And we were telling everybody that I [Inaudible]. Jackie saying to Jack, she said, "See, it could have been Ted being nominated for president instead of you. All you did was tow somebody, and Ted was towing Barry, you know." What was the big deal about this? And he laughed. And they were cute together, they really were.

DAITCH: Yes. I love all those pictures with the children in them.

BATTLE: Well, he knew her value, her political value. There wasn't any doubt about that. And she was valuable politically. I mean that trip to Paris, Germany was unbelievable.

BARRY: Yes, but I remember she wrote Jack [Inaudible] and said, "You [Inaudible]." She was. She was [Inaudible] a wonderful job. She put the class back into the White House.

DAITCH: Yes. And she was so young. It's just extraordinary to me that this young woman, barely what? 30 years old or something, and is such a devastatingly classy first lady.

BATTLE: Yes.

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BARRY: Yes. It was almost as if she was in a trance most of the time. And but then she would click in. I remember the night of the inauguration, we were waiting to get in, I mean the inaugural ball, we were waiting to get in, and they had reserved seats for us, you know, through the family [Inaudible]. But then Jack stood up, he said, "Here, Barry, take my seat." [Inaudible] I sat down and looked around. I was sitting next to Jackie and this woman. And I thought, oh, my God! [Inaudible]. But anyway, Jackie was sitting there and just.... It was like a film, a haze, and that she was not registering what was going on. And people milling down low, flashbulbs going off, and stuff like that. And then I just sat there keeping very quiet. And then she saw me, turned around and she went. "Oh, Barry, hi! How are you?" Then she came back.

DAITCH: Yes.

BARRY: But I think that was her way of protecting herself from all of the [Inaudible]. But she didn't like politics. She was not interested in politics. I ran into her on the street one time in New York, and we chatted for a bit, and she said, "Oh, seeing you brings back such happy memories." So maybe it wasn't so bad for her after all. But she did have quite a time.

DAITCH: Yes. Well, she probably....

BARRY: Raising those babies and all.

DAITCH: I can't imagine. I mean being a private person, it must have been really hard for her. I would imagine that is a protective thing, what you were saying. And she must have been a little bit shell-shocked. I mean just.... I would be.

BATTLE: I think she was shy.

DAITCH: Yes.

BATTLE: But she was brilliant.

BARRY: She certainly did a great job with the White House, restoring it to people's pride.

DAITCH: I can't remember who might have said this to me, or maybe I even read it somewhere, it goes together after a while, but, yes, even though she wasn't interested in politics, I think I read somewhere that Jack did discuss things with her. Did you ever have any...?

BATTLE: I don't know. I don't know about that. I'm sure that he was the master of the house. I don't think there's any doubt about that. Have you gleaned that?

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DAITCH: Oh, yes. Yes, I think that's all, that's very clear. I don't imagine that he would have discussed things.... I expect he discussed things with her just in conversation in the same way that you would discuss anything with your spouse. But whether her, you know, she wouldn't have had technical knowledge.

BATTLE: I see you're not married.

DAITCH: Twenty years.

BARRY: I think Bob was his confidante and alter ego. That relationship was incredibly strong.

DAITCH: Yes. I can't even imagine the loss that Bob....

BATTLE: I can't either. I can't. There's one thing that I just can't.... I don't feel that the assassination has ever been properly examined. It didn't make sense. But I can't imagine Bob letting anything deter him from getting to the bottom of it if there was anything there.

DAITCH: Right.

BATTLE: That's the thing that just kind of convinces me.

BARRY: Unless exposing it would have done such damage to the country.

BATTLE: Well, that's true.

BARRY: That's the only thing I was thinking.

DAITCH: Right. Yes. You know just from what I've looked at, it appears to be just what it was. I mean, again, there's always the possibility of there are things there that we just don't know.

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: But I think it's just so hard to absorb that things can be that random. And that one little crazy guy could do some damage.

BARRY: Yes. Oh, the damage he did! I've often....

BARRY: Somebody could write a very interesting book about the lives that [Inaudible]. I mean you're going along just great, and all of a sudden. But when he was killed, everybody [Inaudible]. Bob's death the same thing. I don't think we would've had the race violence we had if he'd survived.

[-30-]

DAITCH: Right. Yes. They were both extraordinary men. I was not really old enough to register either one, their deaths. But still you just know.... I mean being an historian obviously and having seen all of this stuff and read about it, there's just no doubt that everything would have been different.

BATTLE: Well, yes.

BARRY: It was devastating.

BATTLE: Starting with Vietnam.

DAITCH: Let's talk about that a little bit because....

BARRY: Well, Bill's got inside information.

DAITCH: I wondered, because you were in Australia, and you're in that hemisphere, you're close to Kennedy, you see what's going on.

BATTLE: He was on the way out, and I don't think there's any doubt about that. I've talked to some—who were they? I think.... I read a book by an historian at the University of Maryland who, the only one that I've seen that has gone back into the records and has traced the withdrawal of interests from Vietnam. And I think the big problem was the election coming up. And so they were going to try to wait 'til after that to make the great move. I think Jack Kennedy was convinced; certainly Bob was.

DAITCH: Oh, really! Already at that time?

BATTLE: Yes. That the Vietnamese.... This was a Vietnam problem, not our problem.

DAITCH: Yes. You know there's evidence both ways because you have Kennedy saying one thing, you know, saying this is a Vietnamese problem. And then on the other hand saying that America has to support Vietnam and so on.

BATTLE: Well, General McChristian [Joseph A. McChristian] confirmed that to me. General McChristian, a fellow we knew down in Florida who's now dead, who was top intelligence officer in the Army. He was a general in Vietnam. And is the one who blew the whistle on Westmoreland [William C. Westmoreland] and that group who were souping up the casualty lists and all that, the kills and all that. He said Westmoreland didn't speak to him for a long time.

BARRY: You went up to Vietnam and stayed with Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.]. And then you went back to the States.

BATTLE: Yes.

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BARRY: Reported back to Jack. Tell Vicki about that because....

BATTLE: Well, I stopped there on my way back to the States for consultation or whatever they call it, and stayed with Cabot Lodge in his embassy overnight. And I can't say that I was there long enough to know anything that was basically going on. But I don't think there's any doubt that Jack was looking for avenues out. I don't think there's any doubt that he would have left within the year.

DAITCH: Really! When you talked to him, when you came back for your report, did he say anything that led you to believe that?

BATTLE: Not really. Not that I really remember.

BARRY: What was his response when you told him that the Vietnamese weren't at that point really engaged. You told me the Vietnamese weren't flying these planes or engaging the enemy. It was the.... They called them advisors at that time.

BATTLE: Yes.

BARRY: What you saw was them [Inaudible] pulling people out of the cockpit. I think you told me that.

BATTLE: I never saw them pull people out of a cockpit. So, that's your version.

BARRY: See how humble [Inaudible]?

BATTLE: You don't know [Inaudible] you weren't there.

DAITCH: But the Americans were the ones that were doing the fighting.

BATTLE: Oh, yes, they were. Yes, they were doing it. They'd put a little gook in the backseat, and they'd fly the airplane and do the fighting.

DAITCH: And Kennedy knew that not just because you told him.

BATTLE: He knew it, he knew it.

DAITCH: But because others had told him.

BATTLE: So... Where I really got into that discussion was at dinner one night at Bob's when just Bob and Maxwell Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor] and I were there. Maxwell Taylor was top general at one point and was right in the bosom of the Kennedy circle. He was a fine officer, a fine man. I think I asked something stupid like, "When are we going to quit this charade?" "What do you mean?" "Of this?" I didn't get much of an answer from either one of them. It looked like maybe I shouldn't have said it.

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DAITCH: From Taylor and Kennedy?

BATTLE: Mmmm hmmm. And Bob.

DAITCH: So why did you think that Bob was ready to pull out?

BATTLE: Because he didn't like it from the beginning.

DAITCH: He didn't?

BATTLE: No.

DAITCH: What did he say about it?

BATTLE: I don't remember anything really basically just that I remember that he was always questioning. I don't remember anything specific.

DAITCH: But he was a questioner of just about everything, wasn't he?

BATTLE: Yes. Well, wasn't it well known that he was against the war?

DAITCH: I don't know that. I mean he and President Kennedy were, I think in some ways they were very close-mouthed, and they were kind of keeping their options open depending on what happened next.

BATTLE: Yes, yes.

DAITCH: And so it seems genuinely unclear what would have happened if President Kennedy had lived. I mean Bob Kennedy, he opposed the war later. No doubt about that. But I'm not sure at that time whether he was, you know, opposed to.... Because it sort of hinges on the notion of whether you really believed in the Domino Theory.

BATTLE: Yes.

BARRY: Boy, everybody believed it then.

DAITCH: Yes. I mean it wasn't an unreasonable thing, and certainly that's what....

BATTLE: That's why where we were everybody was for the war, in Australia, the government.

DAITCH: Oh, really?

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BATTLE: Because they saw themselves under the gun down there.

DAITCH: Oh, right, right. Of course.

BATTLE: They're right across the straits from New Guinea.

BARRY: It's hard for me to believe that Jack, with his knowledge of history, didn't realize that [Inaudible] Vietnam and why in the world we helped the French restore their colonial powers. And he had to know that.

DAITCH: Right.

BARRY: And also you're an historian. You know it started with Truman.

DAITCH: Right.

BARRY: Using U.S. ships to take the French back to Vietnam.

DAITCH: Right. Exactly. To support them.

BARRY: And I'm sure that Jack knew that, too. So it's hard for me to believe

that they would have held onto this Domino Theory when it was a civil.... They were trying to get rid of the French.

DAITCH: It was. And I think in retrospect it's easy to see that. But in the middle of the Cold War, the height of the Cold War, you know.... At the same time that we were having the Cuban Missile Crisis, you have to take seriously the concerns about Communism at that time, even though from this perspective we don't think it was quite as imperative. But it's hard to say. I think it's an interesting question.

BARRY: I think McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] really expressed it. He said, he was talking about Iraq, and he said, "In Vietnam we didn't know the culture, we didn't know the history of the country, why those people felt what they wanted to do." And he said, "We're making the same mistake in Iraq." And we are.

DAITCH: Absolutely. Yes. And this, I think, is the value.... One of the things, of course, as an historian, one of the things that I think was just brilliant about Kennedy is his knowledge of history. And I think that was why he was so good.

BATTLE: And the guy there now hasn't got a thimble.

BARRY: Well, he knows about it.

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DAITCH: Right. There is history. No, it's different. I mean it's a completely different approach. One of the things, I read this story; I had not heard it before; I read it in one of your previous interviews, and I thought it was the coolest story and so characteristic of Kennedy. Where he was giving a talk somewhere in Virginia, and Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] lost the speech that he was supposed to give.

BATTLE: It was in Norfolk. That was during the campaign, just before the election.

BARRY: Was it Norfolk or Roanoke?

BATTLE: That was Norfolk where he made that speech. Then we went to Roanoke from Norfolk.

DAITCH: And he was able to just quote Jefferson [Thomas Jefferson] or something and just ad libbed.

BATTLE: Yes.

BARRY: What does Richard Milhouse Nixon have in common with Jefferson?
[Inaudible]

BATTLE: Yes, that's it.

DAITCH: That's perfect. I'm surprised he didn't win Virginia.

BATTLE: He came close. That damned Senator Byrd [Harry F. Byrd, Sr.] and his crowd beat him.

DAITCH: Yes.

BARRY: Oh, he was too liberal, you know. Which was another fallacy about him.

DAITCH: Yes, totally. The thing that's funny is the liberal community, the highbrow liberal community, thought he was too conservative.

BATTLE: That's right.

BARRY: That's how Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] lost his election. He was too liberal on one side and too conservative on the other.

DAITCH: Yes. I just think that, again, trying to characterize the man, you know, his breadth of knowledge. I don't know why, but for the longest time I think historians completely missed the boat on him. And maybe it was because it was too close, you know, too, not enough time had elapsed.

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BATTLE: Mmmm hmmm.

DAITCH: To do a really balanced evaluation of him. But, you know, there was sort of this notion of a lightweight, playboy Camelot presidency; almost got the country blown up by the Russians, you know, and that sort of thing. Where nothing could be further from the truth.

BARRY: You read books that I won't read because I don't read that stuff.

DAITCH: Oh, no, that's just.... I think for a long time even reputable historians were.... I mean they weren't putting it quite that grossly. But I think that his presidency was discounted too much. Whereas now there's a more balanced view. I mean the guy was brilliant. The more I read about him and talk to people....

BATTLE: Oh, I think he was.

DAITCH: Do you?

BATTLE: He had a photographic memory. If you sat next to him when somebody else was making a speech, if it was something he was interested in, he's mouthing that speech.

DAITCH: Really!

BATTLE: As the speaker moves along.

DAITCH: No kidding!

BATTLE: Mmmm hmmm.

DAITCH: And you think he was just kind of absorbing it.

BATTLE: I noticed that when Dad was speaking over in Roanoke that same day, I was watching Jack, and he was repeating every word Dad said.

BARRY: What was the funny story about, he gave something, was it to Red Fay, to read?

BATTLE: Huh?

BARRY: He gave something to Red Fay, was it Red Fay? It was on the airplane. And he gave him something to read. And, you know, whoever it was sat to read. And Jack said, "Damn it! I gave it to you to read not memorize." So he was speed reading, he said. Do you remember the details of that...?

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BATTLE: No, I don't.

BARRY: I thought it was so typical, you know, he gave it to him to read.

DAITCH: Not memorize. I would imagine that he expected the people around him to be on top of things, you know.

BATTLE: Well, he did not suffer fools lightly.

DAITCH: He suffered them more than Bob did.

BATTLE: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

BARRY: Bob wouldn't put up with for two seconds with.... That's how his reputation got skewed. Unless Bob was with the children. Bill had arranged some political group here in Charlestown, with some big shots. And Bob spent the whole time teaching all the little kids how to dive. And they were doing racing [Inaudible]. He was wonderful with children.

DAITCH: Yes.

BARRY: His death just devastated that family. I mean at the funeral Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] was....

DAITCH: I can't imagine.

BARRY: [Inaudible].

DAITCH: Was she pregnant when he died?

BARRY: Yes.

DAITCH: Yes, I thought so. Oh, my gosh! And all those children. That must have been horrible.

BARRY: Well, when he died, we were able to get an *au pair* girl to come, from here, who was just wonderful. [Inaudible]. They [Inaudible]. Because she was the only one the children respected or [Inaudible]. She was the only one [Inaudible].

DAITCH: I've heard they were quite the handful.

BARRY: Yes.

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DAITCH: It's hard to even imagine. I mean it's hard for anyone. But, you know, to have your husband die in such a way. It's just horrible. But this thing about, getting back to the thing about suffering fools, it's probably right to say that Bob was more like that Jack than that. Or maybe more forceful about it.

BATTLE: Mmmm hmmm.

DAITCH: Or less subtle. Because, you know, again, this fellow had told me that the Kennedy White House was just.... I mean he said if someone made

a mistake, he wouldn't be, nobody would be publicly berated or embarrassed or anything like that. It was just, okay, there was a mistake made. We'll correct it. We'll move on. And that Kennedy was just such a gracious, graceful leader.

BATTLE: Kind. Mmmm hmmm.

DAITCH: He told me a story that I thought was.... You probably know hundreds of similar stories, but this was the junior aide that I was talking about at that time who later became an expert in management styles and whatnot. But he was just saying that Kennedy was, he was at some gathering to which he was always invited. Not always, but you know what I mean. He felt very included in things even though he was a junior person. And Kennedy had met his wife at one of these gatherings briefly and, you know, maybe they chatted for a few moments at the time. And he remembered it.

BARRY: Oh, he did.

DAITCH: And commented on it later and said, "Oh, I met your wife, and we had a lovely conversation." That kind of thing.

BARRY: I remember we were over in West Virginia, the West Virginia Primary, and we got things set up for the children and ran over to him to see what was going on. And Jack came in, and there were hundreds of people there. And he said, "Barry! Come here! I'm so glad you made it." [Inaudible] he had total recall as far as I was [Inaudible].

BATTLE: I was over there the whole time through that West Virginia Primary. Sarge Shriver and I were staying down at the hotel in Huntington. And I had been.... When I got out of law school, I went to West Virginia to get a job with Columbia Gas System in Charleston. And of course my job there was to deal with all of the counties in southern West Virginia, all those gas counties down there. And I made a lot of close friends down there, those old mountaineers down there. Jack called me from Wisconsin before that. He had to make up his mind whether he was going to West Virginia before the results were in in the Wisconsin Primary. And had he known he was going to win in Wisconsin, I doubt he would've gone to West Virginia because that was the worst state in the Union by far for Jack Kennedy, Catholic.

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DAITCH: Right. Not only that, but rich Catholic.

BATTLE: Yes, yes.

DAITCH: You know....

BATTLE: And he asked me if I would go out there and take Bob out there and run him through southern West Virginia. And I didn't come back. And we won.

BARRY: Tell him about your [Inaudible] those hard-shell Baptists.

BATTLE: They weren't hard-shell Baptists. These were the old snake-worshippers.

DAITCH: Snake handlers, not worshippers.

BATTLE: Yes, that's what they were. And they were preaching that the Roman Catholics were the Romans that crucified Jesus.

DAITCH: Oh, yes!

BATTLE: So I decided when I came back after meeting with a group of them, went to the hotel, and we were, "How are you going to fight that?" I had a couple of drinks. I said, "Sarge, I'm going to go down there, but you probably won't want to go with me." And he didn't. I went down there, and I got them all together, and I said, "Fellows, look! You've all got this thing all wrong. Jack Kennedy's not a Roman Catholic. He's an Irish Catholic. He's never been to Rome in his life. His family came over from Ireland like all these Presbyterians around here in the Potato Famine, and he's never been to Rome." "Oh, is that right?" "Yeah, that's right." I don't know if it did any good or not, but it was fun.

DAITCH: That is fun. Should have gone over well.

BATTLE: Yes, it did.

DAITCH: Irish in West Virginia.

BATTLE: Better than Roman Catholic.

DAITCH: Oh, that's cute. Everybody says that he was really genuinely.... Of course that's about the time I was born, and I'm pretty well versed in West Virginia. But, yes, it was definitely poor and backwards and so on.

BATTLE: Yes.

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DAITCH: And people say that he had genuinely never seen anything quite like that.

BATTLE: I'm sure.

DAITCH: I guess a lot of people who were with him.

BATTLE: That's right. One of the secretaries in the law office here, I was back here practicing law by then; I'd left West Virginia and come home. But I still have an uncle and family out there. And one of my secretaries in the law office here, her father was an Episcopal bishop from southern West Virginia. And, a worshiped guy, well respected. Robert E. Lee Strider was his name. Lived up in Charles Town. And she said she thought her father would like to meet Jack Kennedy. He was a political power. So we set it up at one of the meetings at the racetrack up there. And we went around to Bishop Strider's house, and I introduced Jack to Bishop Strider. And he said, "Young man, I should tell you right off the bat the only time I have ever voted Republican was when Al Smith [Alfred E. Smith] ran for the Democratic nomination. And it was because of the Catholic issue. The way he handled it." Jack looked like what the hell did you bring me up here for?

DAITCH: That's not a good start.

BATTLE: But then he kind of grinned and said, "That's the way he handled it. He would not discuss it. You've handled yours entirely differently. I'm satisfied, and I'd be delighted to work with you." And the next morning the southern coal fields papers all had "BISHOP STRIDER SUPPORTS KENNEDY!" That was big. That was real big. And it did make a big difference.

DAITCH: How did the people crowds, wherever you had Kennedy come out and do a talk or something, how did people respond to him?

BATTLE: They loved him.

DAITCH: Did they?

BATTLE: Oh, Kennedy was big in West Virginia by the time that campaign was over, yes.

BARRY: He was always late. He never had any money.

DAITCH: I've heard he never carried any pocket money.

BATTLE: No, he never did.

DAITCH: And that he was always late. I have a, and it's one of my treasured possessions, it's a silly thing. But my aunt, who lived down in Raleigh

County, you know, out in the coal fields, and she loved him. And when she died, my mom and I were clearing out her house; she didn't have any kids, I found a

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“Kennedy for President” button. And where it says “Kennedy for President,” she had taken a piece of masking tape or something like that, and it's old and wrinkled, you know. And put it over the “For President” and wrote “Be” on it.

BATTLE: That's good.

DAITCH: I love that.

BATTLE: Let me show you this. I'm told by....

BARRY: I think this picture was [Inaudible].

BATTLE: That's in West Virginia.

BARRY: This is when the two of them were flying into West Virginia.

DAITCH: Oh!

BARRY: Two very handsome men.

DAITCH: Oh, yes! Absolutely! Wow! No wonder West Virginia went for Kennedy.

BARRY: Yes.

DAITCH: Did he always choose like good-looking aides and assistants?

BARRY: I guess so. I think he was probably more interested [Inaudible]. Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger] is certainly large.

BATTLE: They tell me that he hadn't written anything like that in any of his papers.

DAITCH: Oh, really! Oh, wow!

BATTLE: I was sworn in, I was the only one sworn in by the President.

DAITCH: The only ambassador [Inaudible] with best wishes. “With the highest esteem and best wishes from an old friend.”

BARRY: This is our older boy. He was five at the time, almost as big as Jackie. He kept bumping into the President all the time this was going on. And Bobby [Inaudible].

BATTLE: This experience displayed some quality that he had. I don't remember what was going on, but something important was going on. And he was supposed to.... And he was going to leave there to come to here.
He just moved from

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one scene to another spoke. The thing that always impressed me was that he could focus on what he was doing.

DAITCH: At the immediate moment.

BATTLE: At the immediate moment.

DAITCH: Yes. You know people have told me that about him just in terms of meeting someone even just for a moment. Well, in fact the fellow that I was telling you that he had met his wife, you know, at some gathering, she said for those few moments, you felt like you were the only person in the world.

BATTLE: That's true.

DAITCH: And that he was...

BARRY: That was so true.

DAITCH: ...totally interested in you.

BARRY: Clinton [Bill Clinton] evidently had the same ability. I never met him, but I gather he had it.

BATTLE: Who?

BARRY: Clinton.

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: I've heard he did, too, yes.

BARRY: Would you like some more coffee?

DAITCH: I don't think so, thank you. Although I, if you don't mind, I would....
[Interruption] There was something that I wanted to ask you about that I saw in one of the other interviews. And I think this is an interesting thing. I think it might be one of those situations where Kennedy made his own decisions and kept his thoughts to himself and just listened to other people. But it's hard to say what he really thought. You had said in a previous interview that you were pretty sure that he was going to select Johnson as a running mate. And that that seemed to be the obvious thing to do and that he was going to do it. But there were plenty of other people...

BATTLE: Oh, yes.

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DAITCH: ...who said, No, no, no! He was not going to do that, that's not what he wanted.

BATTLE: That's right. Well, I don't know how I phrased it. But I do remember that the two people that were for Johnson were Abe Ribicoff [Abraham Alexander Ribicoff] and me. And I didn't realize until that night when I met Mr. Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.], who was also for Johnson....

DAITCH: Oh, Joe Kennedy.

BATTLE: Yes. That my opinion had carried that much weight with him.

DAITCH: Really!

BATTLE: I didn't. I mean I didn't accept that. And of course Bob was for Scoop Jackson [Henry M. Jackson], Henry Jackson, from Washington. Who was a good man but wouldn't have brought much to the ticket, I'm afraid. That was what we were thinking. I didn't like Johnson.

DAITCH: Yes.

BATTLE: Personally.

DAITCH: Did Jack?

BATTLE: I don't think so.

DAITCH: You don't think he did?

BATTLE: I think he respected him as a politician. But then there was a lot of opposition to him because he was Texan, Southern, and all that stuff.

Then he turned out to be the most progressive one they could.... Of course he was a consummate politician. He knew where the wind was blowing. I guess Bob had a little argument with the old Speaker that day about it. I don't know what that relationship was.

DAITCH: Had an argument with...?

BATTLE: The Speaker.

DAITCH: Rayburn?

BATTLE: Rayburn, Sam Rayburn [Samuel Taliaferro Rayburn].

DAITCH: About Johnson?

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BATTLE: Yes. [Interruption: barking dog and brief conversation relating to it.]

DAITCH: But I guess there were a lot of people disappointed. I think this is an example, and I could be wrong, and I'm asking you, but of Kennedy's ability to bring everybody in...

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: ...talk to them, make them feel valued.

BATTLE: That's right.

DAITCH: And I wonder if that's why so many people were so sure that he wasn't going to choose Johnson, because he had made them feel that their opinions mattered. And of course I'm sure they did.

BATTLE: I don't know. I didn't know that a lot of people felt that he wasn't going to. I'm just trying to think back what the breaking news was and how I got the word that he was going to appoint Johnson. I was called over to the hotel where they all were staying, up in the suite which was headquarters, and where they interviewed me as to why I thought Johnson. And it was all political, all political.

DAITCH: Well, you can't do anything if you can't win the election.

BATTLE: That's right. And it turned out to be true.

DAITCH: I think there's a lot of misinformation going on about that whole thing. Because, as I say, so many people thought that he wasn't going to

choose Johnson. Or thought, and I don't know whether you think this or not, but if he asked Johnson thinking that he would turn it down, and didn't really want him. [Interruption; ringing telephone] Sounds like it was for you.

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: Anyway, so did you think that.... I mean I don't know if Kennedy even mentioned this to you. But did he seem to think or did you think that Johnson would turn him down?

BATTLE: No, I didn't think so. That same Fourth of July when we were up in Hyannis, Jack and I were playing golf. And he asked me who I thought he ought to ask for vice president. That was the Fourth of July. And I told him, I said, "Lyndon Johnson." He said, "What...."

[END SIDE 2, TAPE 1; BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

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BARRY: [Inaudible].

DAITCH: I think we'll be done shortly.

BATTLE: So I said to him, "Why wouldn't he? Right now he's one of the most powerful men probably next to the President and maybe more powerful than the President, Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower], because he's the majority leader in the Senate, and the majority is not the president's party. That'd make him a tremendously powerful fellow. If you win the election, he'll be your messenger boy. And that wasn't going to sit too good with Lyndon Baines Johnson." And, you know, he didn't say anything. But that to me that was the compelling thing why Johnson would take it. If Jack won and he was the majority leader of the Democratic Party, he wouldn't be nearly as important as he was in control of the Senate and being needed by the President for anything the President wanted to do.

DAITCH: Yes. So you were thinking that he would take it.

BATTLE: Yes, I thought he would. I didn't.... That was my view, for what it was worth.

DAITCH: Well, it turned out to be right.

BATTLE: Yes. Common sense.

DAITCH: That's just an interesting thing, and they were an interesting pair. Did you ever talk to him at all? Or did he ever mention how Johnson

worked with him or how he fit into this White House?

BATTLE: Well, I'd hear him talk about him, you know, he and Bob would. You'd always hear muffled sounds.

DAITCH: Yeah, and a little comment here and there.

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: Well, we know Bob didn't like him.

BATTLE: Well, it was mutual.

DAITCH: Yes. There was never any secret about that.

BATTLE: One of the people that Bob won over, was known as an old curmudgeon, was Howard Smith [Howard W. Smith], the head of the.... He was my own congressman from Virginia. Venerable old guy. He had his wingtip collar and

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everything. He was head of the Ways and Means Committee, which was then the most important one in the House. I was talking to him once, one time, about Bobby. And he said, "That little polecat! You can't help but like him."

DAITCH: Yes. I don't know. That's not probably the thing that I've heard about Bob Kennedy, is that he was likeable.

BATTLE: Well, he could be. He could be.

DAITCH: I get the impression about him that he was just very serious.

BATTLE: Well, as I say, he had a human side. He knew people. And if he wanted to work them, he could do it. Don't you think so?

DAITCH: There's one comment that you had made in another interview that I just wanted to ask you about real quick. I thought it was an interesting comment. You said that you had told the interviewer that you were supporting Kennedy because you'd known him for a long time, and you had confidence in him.

BATTLE: Mmmm hmmm.

DAITCH: And I was thinking, what made you have confidence in Kennedy? You

had known him for a long time. But you could just as well have thought, you know, he's young, he's maybe your age. You guys were younger than I am now when....

BATTLE: Isn't that amazing?

DAITCH: Yes. And shooting for the presidency of the United States. Maybe you could have felt, well, he's a little too young, and I'd rather have somebody, you know, my dad's age being president. Why did you have confidence in him?

BATTLE: Well, I think that's just, that was the nature of Jack Kennedy. People knew him.... I don't know, I've reacted to people, certain people, one way. I guess one of the things that has helped me be successful was to be able to be a good judge of people through my life, and to put my trust and my confidence in the right people. And it turned out to be that way. I've had very capable people do my work.

DAITCH: Always a good thing.

BATTLE: That's right. That's smart. And I think that just I had felt strongly about Jack Kennedy.

DAITCH: Mmmm hmmm. Yes. I just wondered whether....

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BATTLE: Of course there was such a contrast between him and Richard Nixon.

DAITCH: Oh, yes!

BATTLE: There wasn't any genius there.

DAITCH: Yes. Did you know Nixon at all?

BATTLE: I'd met him. I didn't know him. He could be cordial, too. You know you don't get to be that top in politics without the ability to win people, if you want.

DAITCH: Right. Yes. Well, and Kennedy was the expert at that. I mean, you know, beyond just his being affable and charming and that sort of thing.

BATTLE: Well, he was direct. On one of the occasions we had a meeting in West Virginia, I think we were going to it in that picture, in Huntington, and

it was something to do with the minimum wage law. Obviously the manufacturers were opposed to it. And this fellow asked him a question after he'd made his speech to this group in Huntington. Jack said, "Well, this wage law, you have to have...." I don't know how many, say, 300 employees. That's not the right number, but say 300 employees before it applies to you. He said, "Do you have 300?" The fellow said, "Yes, I do. I have more than 300." And he said, "Well, you'll be opposed to it then." This fellow said, "I never had a politician talk to me that way in my life." Saying, Well, you won't like what I want to do.

DAITCH: Yes. But I'm going to do it anyway.

BATTLE: Because I want to do it, I think we ought to do it. He said, "I'm going to vote for you."

DAITCH: He did? The guy said he's going to vote for him?

BATTLE: Yes, yes, that's right.

DAITCH: Wow! And that makes total sense to me. That's what politicians should be saying. Stand up for whatever you think and whatever you're going to do and do it.

BATTLE: That's right.

BARRY: You know, I love that *West Wing*. The man that plays the president there reminds me of his whole believe in who he is. He reminds me so much of my impression.

BATTLE: I think it was meant to. I've only watched the show a few times. But I think it was meant to be....

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BARRY: Well, the intelligence and humanity...

BATTLE: I think the whole thing is to reflect the Kennedy White House.

DAITCH: I've thought so.

BATTLE: And the people who were around him and all that. Kenny O'Donnell.

DAITCH: But isn't that what people think of as the finest example of a presidency?

BARRY: Mmmm hmmm.

DAITCH: When people think about what the White House should be and what the presidency should be, they think of the Kennedy presidency, I think. Well, maybe liberal people do.

BARRY: And yet you still have this visceral reaction to the Kennedys. [Inaudible]. We were at a dinner party one night [Inaudible] my son was there. And this man across the table started badmouthing Kennedy [Inaudible]. My son [Inaudible]. And he kept on. I said, [Inaudible]. He said thing third thing, my son, who [Inaudible]. He said, "You know you don't know how lucky you are. I've seen my father rip somebody's [Inaudible] out." He said, [Inaudible].

DAITCH: That's cute, yes. I do think there is a little bit of that, though. And I wonder if it's maybe a kind of resentment that he sort of seemed to have it all, and the golden boy, you know.

BATTLE: Yes. Of course it is. Of course it is. A lot of it's resentment. A lot of it is religion. Something in the paper the other day, the largest in this country, is it Roman Catholic?

BARRY: I'm sorry. What did you say?

BATTLE: The greatest number, in any religion in this country is Roman Catholic?

BARRY: No, its Evangelicals. That's the fastest growing religion.

BATTLE: I don't know what's fastest growing, but this is the largest in the paper I was reading last night

BARRY: Well, I guess now with all the Hispanics that are coming, maybe so.

DAITCH: Maybe so, yes. I haven't read statistics.

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BATTLE: Are you Roman Catholic?

DAITCH: No.

BATTLE: How'd you get your job?

BARRY: She earned it.

DAITCH: That's right. I do find that interesting, though, about the resentment

kind of thing. And I think that played as much a part sometimes as the Catholicism thing. In a state like West Virginia, people resent, and I can say this from experience, people resent being looked down upon or thought of as backwards and poor and grubby by people who have never seen such things. And I think that one of the reasons that Kennedy probably did so well there is that he was genuinely interested and curious, and again, I'm gathering this from people I've talked to, but not patronizing. And sure, shocked by some of the conditions that he saw, but not patronizing about it. And there's a way to be about those things. The fact that he even came to the state, the fact that he even sort of deigned to come to West Virginia and see what conditions were really like there and talk to people and ask for their votes, that probably won them over more than anything. Apart from the religious stuff and all of that.

BATTLE: And paid attention to them as people, which hadn't happened.

DAITCH: Right, right. And probably the same thing with Bob Kennedy, who had been happening, you know, when he was campaigning in places where other people never went. Didn't bother to go.

BATTLE: Yes.

DAITCH: It's an interesting....

BATTLE: What else do you want?

DAITCH: I think we're just about done. I think we're getting to the point that we're just chitchatting, huh?

BATTLE: Have you read my whole statement on....

[END OF INTERVIEW#4]

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